



March 6, 2012

Aging Committee

Testimony in Support of Bill 5336

**AN ACT INCREASING FUNDING FOR ELDERLY NUTRITION**

Submitted by Dianne Stone

Good Morning Senator Prague, Representative Serra and members of the Aging Committee. I am Dianne Stone and I am the Director of the Newington Senior and Disabled Center. I am also the President of the Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about the elderly nutrition program. As you know, the program includes both home delivered meals and congregate meals. Both are equally important and I trust that others will speak about the importance of the home delivered meal, especially in the context of the rebalancing of long term care. I am going to focus my remarks on the congregate meal program.

When the first Senior Centers were established more than 50 years ago, it was to address the isolation and poor nutrition of community living older adults. Those same issues affect older adults today and the congregate meal remains the most effective way to address them. While Senior Centers have grown into multi-agencies providing a vast array of programs and services that support community living, promote wellness, enhance quality of life and create opportunities for positive aging, nutrition remains as the cornerstone. In our report, A Profile of Senior Centers in Connecticut, we identify that more than 80% of Senior Centers provide a congregate meal. Along with information and referral and transportation, the congregate meal is among the top three services provided. It is as relevant and needed now as it was in the 1950's. Congregate meal programs reduce hunger and food insecurity; promote the health and well-being of older adults by assisting them to access nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services and; promote socialization and community involvement.

The Elderly Nutrition Program has faced some serious challenges in this economy. Rising food costs and fuel costs without increased funding are causing cutbacks in service. While some of our Centers provide their own congregate meals, most of us partner with the access agencies that are grantees under the Older Americans Act as meal sites. We give those agencies credit for being able to continue to do what they do with

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level funding but we are witnessing erosion. At a time when we should be modernizing the program to meet the needs of a new generation, we are struggling to maintain what we have.

I urge you to protect the congregate meal program by ensuring it is appropriately prioritized and adequately funded.